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Poetry by E. Robinson

Africans In U.S.—Without A Religion

But we do have a religion--the Black Church. We are Baptists, Methodists, Seventh Day Adventists, Catholics, etc. Some of us attend quiet "respectable" services; some of us go to churches where we jump and shout; some of us get down-right frenzied, get to falling out, speaking in tongues, and so forth. But for the vast majority of us - African people in the U.S. - it is true that we do not have a religion. Rather, as Christians(or Muslims, for that matter), we are but using the religion of others. And the main question,when one borrows something, is: Does the borrowed thing meet one's needs? Does it work as well as that which one had owned and the loss of which necessitated the borrowing? A man's car is stolen. He borrows a car from someone. But the borrowed car has defective brakes; so that every time the man drives, he risks catastrophe. Yes, the man does have the use of a car. However, the car does not adequately meet his needs.

As Christians, we are like this man with the borrowed car. We are using something that is not only not meeting our needs but is both not giving us protection against catastrophe and leading us into it. Certainly, it must be considered a catastrophe, or that we are on the brink of one, that upwards of a half million African men are locked away in America's jails and prisons; that, in many communities, the primary cause of death for our young men is homicide perpetrated by other young African men; that drug and alcohol addiction are phenomena that many of us are resigned to accept as being part of our life-style, a part which many of us feel powerless to do anything about; that maybe the largest portion of those of us in professional positions feel a greater loyalty to those professions, and our hoped-for upward movement in them, than to the African communities whence we come; etc. In addition to these matters, we are having, despite our attempts to pretend that it's just a product of racist Caucasians' imagination, serious problems holding our men and women and our families together.

In response to this reality, we can declare, "Yes, but

white people are having the same problem." And, in fact, some of our "intellectuals" commonly make use of such a declaration in protesting against negative publicity regarding our situation, as if the fact that Caucasians are having their problems too would magically make ours disappear. What we neglect to be mindful of, when we try to minimize the seriousness of our predicament by pointing to problems in Caucasian society, is that we, being a minority in this country, can much less afford to continue in our predicament than can the majority. As we go on being ravaged by social, economic, and other forces, we, like any other people, grow angry and frustrated. We eventually come to be seen as threatening. And to be a minority in a country, to be seen as a threat, and to be expendable--that is a dangerous situation for such a group of people to be in. The days when America needed us to pick its cotton and tobacco are long gone, as were the days when America needed us to hammer its steel and weld and bolt its autos together. We are living in a technological period in which we simply are not needed. Consequently, we are expendable.

Instead of being obsessed with the question of the image of ourselves - as portrayed in movies, television news, books, etc. - in the eyes of Caucasians, our situation requires that we get serious about our reality, the forces that shape it, and those forces that could change this reality. Our situation requires that we return those borrowed things that are not meeting our needs, that are leading us intoocatastrophe.

We claim Christianity, call it the "Black Church," and await a Second Coming--while we maintain the status of unwelcome stepchildren begging for pennies and candy from a parent who wishes we would simply go away. In the meantime, and for the most part, "our" "Black Church" bids us worship and have faith in a mythological Caucasian god/man, exhorts us to seek a place in "heaven"(after death, of course), and just keeps on passing the collection plate. Noting this general tendency

on the part the "Black Church" to function in a manner oblivious of our earthly needs and aspirations, some of us suggest that we turn from religion altogether. But the fact is that, as hard and/or complex as living in America is, many of us need the kind of emotional/psychological release that religious ritual provides.

Nevertheless, the "Black Church" is a borrowed thing, a thing that is not meeting our needs, that is not functioning in our interests. Throughout time, it has been primarily two things which have been most effective in mobilizing oppressed groups of people--land and religion. Marcus Garvey clearly recognized the power of a people's identification with a particular land and used the idea of an actual and a symbolic "back to Africa" idea to successfully mobilize large numbers of African people in America. Malcolm, once a Christian himself, saw that Christianity was, for us, a borrowed religion, and, particularly while he was in the Nation of Islam and under the mentorship of Elija Muhammad, moved to head us away from Christianity and toward Islam. Malcolm recognized that Christianity had been used as an effective tool to disrupt traditional cultures in Africa and had paved the way for European colonization of Africa. He saw that Christianity had been employed to "justify" the institution of slavery, to move many slaves to accept their condition of servitude as "God's will," and to make us "suffer peacefully" under varying forms of bondage.

On the other hand, Harriet Tubman, Nat Turner, and several other of our anti-slavery heroes who did not believe in suffering peacefully were devout Christians. But what seems to separate them from others of us who were or/and are Christians is that they interpreted "the good book" for themselves and applied what they read to an earthly situation; namely, bondage. They did not rely on Caucasian preachers, or the African preachers who learned from them, to deliver to them "the word." But the Nat Turners, et al are exceptions. Typically, Christianity does not function in our interests. And, typically, the "Black Church" serves to do no more than to parrot the anti-African ideas and doct-

rines set forth by Caucasian Church leaders.

We have to ask of ourselves and each other: What functions should religion serve for us? In most traditional societies, religion has served the function of providing a group of people with a code of behavior, a sense of group identity, a means of coping in a non-destructive manner with problems and stresses, and a sense of community solidarity. In traditional African societies, as well as others, religion was founded upon a naturistic base through which those societies felt kinship with their lands and forces of nature and, in essence, lived in harmony with their surroundings. Christianity, as it has been so profoundly corrupted by European and Euro-American Church leaders and "scholars," serves none of these functions for us except one. It does provide us with a code of behavior, but a code which defines "right" and "wrong" on the basis of how the Caucasian is affected by what we do.

What our situation calls for is a religious belief system which motivates us to act in our own collective interests, which gives us a sense of group identity and loyalty to the interests of our group, which provides us with role models with whom we can identify, which exhorts us to refuse to tolerate subjugation.

It is not an accident that the Jesus, who lived in an area described by the Greek historian Herodotus (who lived in the fifth century B.C.) as being populated by dark-skinned people with woolly hair, is portrayed in statues, literature, etc. as being a Caucasian. Nor is it an accident that Moses, who was an Egyptian, is portrayed in like manner. It is especially not an accident that these and other such historically false portrayals are to be found in the buildings, prayer books, hymnals, etc. of the "Black Church." Europeans and Euro-Americans learned quite sometime ago how effective it is to kill the spirit, or at least put it to sleep, of a people by having them tied to a religious belief system in which the figures they worship and/or give homage to look like those who, in reality, hold them in bondage. (Continued on page 12)

FLAME Editorial Policy

The HARAMBEE FLAME, the monthly publication of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization(parent chapter of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization, Inc.), is a pan-Africanist newsletter. This means that the FLAME's priority, with respect to news and views, is African people and events and developments which affect us and are, or should be, of concern to us. The FLAME does not recognize any artificial distinctions between African people based solely on place of birth. Therefore, references to African people are made on the basis of our common ancestry. An exception to this policy is the reprinting of articles, or excerpts thereof, from other publications, in which case we do not alter the terms used therein to fit our editorial policy.

Articles contained in the FLAME do not necessarily represent the official positions of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization unless they are accompanied by a statement identifying the views as being those of the organization. Generally speaking, all unsigned articles are by the editor.

We encourage you to submit articles to the FLAME. Please enclose with your submission a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Articles should not exceed 900 words. Short stories are subject to the same restriction with respect to length. We also welcome poetry and graphics. Send your submissions to: HARAMBEE FLAME
Attn: Editor
Harambee Afrikan Cultural Org.
P.O. Box 2500
Lincoln, NE 68502

Announcements

CRITICAL SOCIAL ISSUES is presently seeking articles for its fall 1987 publication. The theme of the publication is "critical issues affecting women of color in the United States and/or in the Diaspora." Articles must be submitted by June 15, 1987. Articles should contain a maximum of 5,000 words, not including the bibliography, notes, graphs, etc. All submissions should be typed, double-spaced, on white bond paper($8\frac{1}{2}$ x 11). A brief auto biographical statement should also be enclosed. Articles should be mailed to:

CRITICAL SOCIAL ISSUES
P.O. Box 2075
Baltimore, Maryland
21203-5112

The Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization will be holding its annual banquet on April 18 at the Nebraska State Prison in Lincoln. The banquet will run from 4:45 to 8:00 p.m. If you are interested in attending, write to: Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization; P.O. Box 2500; Lincoln, NE; 68502-0500. Or call 471-3161 (ext. 380) between the hours of noon and three, Monday through Friday. More information forthcoming.

If you are interested in submitting announcements of relevance to African people, you are welcomed to do so. Try to get your announcement to us by the middle of the month. In addition, the HARAMBEE FLAME will run ads. If you are interested, please contact us. We will not run ads that demean African people and/or promote practices or policies that run counter to our interests.

At the March 24th. Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization meeting(6-8 p.m.), A'Jamal Rashad Byndon will be delivering a presentation on the issue of leadership and leadership needs in African communities in the U.S., with a focus on Omaha.

From Other Sources

Job Of Another African Jeopardized By Zionist Groups

(Editor's note: On this past 7th. of January, Ernie Chambers of Omaha, the only African member of the Nebraska State Legislature and a sixteen-year veteran of that body, was defeated in his bid for chairmanship of the judiciary committee. Ernie's defeat followed by only a matter of days the release and circulation of a report, dated "December 1986," by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith in which Senator Chambers is portrayed as a racist, anti-Jew, extremist, etc. While the Anti-Defamation League's regional director, Yitzak Santis claimed that the timing of the report's circulation was only coincidental, a January 5th. article in the OMAHA WORLD HERALD quoted him as stating: "But we are certainly concerned about the possibility of someone becoming chairman of the Judiciary Committee who has lent the good name of the office of state senator to extremist groups and enhanced their public profile--giving them credibility by his presence at their meetings."

Ernie Chambers has been a consistent advocate for oppressed groups and has steadfastly supported the right of people to defend themselves against attack by forces of oppression. Functioning in such a role, he has not failed to be critical of Israel for its partnership with the South African government, of Zionists for their attacks on Jesse Jackson, etc.)

"(Ernest)Dube began teaching here(State University of New York at Stony Brook) in 1977, but his problems only began in 1983, when he was denounced by a visiting Israeli professor for teaching that Zionism, Nazism and apartheid were 'the three forms of racism.' He was soon the object of protests by the B'nai B'rith anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Congress and the American Jewish Committee.

"Four faculty committees had recommended tenure for Dube, but they were overruled last month by SUNY Chancellor Clifton Wharton...

"University officials contend that Dube was denied ten-

ure because of a weak publishing record...

"Nevertheless, Dube says he plans to sue SUNY in federal court...Dube charges that the tenure denial was pushed 'by right-wing Zionist groups supported by the government.'

"The role of off-campus organizations in Dube's tenure denial may have been critical. In September 1983, Anti-Defamation League officials met with aides to Gov. Mario Cuomo, who then issued a statement condemning Dube's 'twisted logic.'"

-Above passages excerpted from "Anti-Zionist Professor Denied Tenure," which appears on page 9 of the March 4 edition of the GUARDIAN.

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Swastikas, White Hoods, And Jesus

"The growing Klan/Nazi front emerging in Chicago represents the new public face of a movement which is spreading racist terror across the U.S. In its public, visible form it calls itself the Aryan Nations, 5th Era Klan or simply Identity. In its para-military form, it is known as the Order, Bruder Schweigen(Silent Brotherhood), or White American Bastion...

"The clearest manifestation of the threat posed by these developments was the emergence in 1984-85 of the Order. This paramilitary alliance, drawn from Klan, Nazi and survivalist groups across the country, was responsible for the assassination of Allan Berg, a Denver-base Jewish talkshow host, several bombings and the theft of $2 million(most still unrecovered), before many of its original members were arrested. The White Patriot Party, headed by Glen Miller in North Carolina, has thousands of followers and recruits active duty soldiers from Fort Bragg and Camp Lejune. Strong evidence suggests that this group used $50,000 stolen by the Order to purchase rockets, weapons and explosives stolen by servicemen from Fort Bragg...

"Although the racist movement is still split into many different organizations, the last period has seen its historic weakness of disunity replaced by a dangerous unity of practice. One key factor in this process is the widely shared belief in 'Christian Identity'. Identity defines the peoples of Northern Europe as the descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. These Europeans, plus the white inhabitants of the United States, are the real chosen of God. The dominant trend in Identity believes that Jews are the children of Satan. In this 'religion' Jesus was not a Jew, but a white Aryan; and all people of color are 'pre-Adamic bestial mud people.'"

-Above passages excerpted from "The New Klan/Nazi Alliance," which appears on pages 8 and 9 of the Winter/Spring edition of BREAKTHROUGH.

Infant Mortality in the U.S.

"The Children's Defense Fund of Washington, D.C. has released a report, 'The Health Of America's Children', indicating that the U.S. is now tied for last place in a list of 20 industrialized countries whose infant mortality rates have been charted for the last 35 years by the organization.

"...'Among the 20 industrialized nations we looked at, the U.S. is the only country that doesn't offer pregnant women access to prenatal care and delivery services, the only one that fails to provide all poor women and children health coverage.' The death rate for black U.S. infants is worse. In the nation's capital 24.3 out of 1,000 black babies die in their first year of life. The fact is, a child in Trinidad or Costa Rica has a better chance of living through their first year than a black child in Washington, D.C."

-Above passages excerpted from "U.S. Leads Industrial World In The Production of Dead Babies," which appears on page 4 of the Feb. 18-24 edition of IN THESE TIMES.

South Africa-Backed Terrorists A Primary Cause Of Hunger In Mozambique

"Mozambique's dire food situation is finally drawing some international attention and aid. With up to 4 million of this country's 14 million people going hungry, the U.S. has pledged 150,000 tons of additional food aid for this year...Two British charities--Oxfam and the Save The Children Fund--have meanwhile launched special drives earmarked for Mozambique.

"The emergency was not a bolt out of the blue, however. Maputo has been issuing urgent calls for help for the past six months to guarantee the survival of the more than a third of its population now at risk. But, the major aid donors have been slow to respond.

"The flight to urban centers, large and small, happens

wherever the MNR(the South African-backed Mozambique National Resistance) is active. Terror against the rural population seems a deliberate South African strategy, both to disrupt agriculture and to put urban services under enormous strain.

"It is not merely food that the MNR's victims lack. As relief workers point out, those displace by the war are frequently completely destitute. They flee from MNR raids with nothing but what they were wearing; they have no seeds tp plant next year's crops, no hand-tools, no domestic utensils...

"Schools and health posts have also fallen victim to MNR destruction. According to Unicef, since 1982, 484 health posts and centers have been destroyed(42% of the total). Three hundred thousand children of primary school age are without places because their schools have been burned down.

"As a result, the progress Mozambique made in the social services in the immediate post-independence period has been reversed. Vaccination programs, so vital for protecting children's health, cannot be implemented in much of the countryside. Unicef estimates that between 325 and 375 children in every 1000 live births die before the age of five...and the blame can be attributed almost exclusively to the effects of South African destabilization."

-Above passages excerpted from "Famine Relief Arrives--At Last," which appears on page 13 of the Feb. 25 edition of THE GUARDIAN.

Groups Meet To Strengthen Unity In Haiti

"In the year since President-for-Life Jean-Claude Duvalier fled into exile, Haitians have wasted little time in organizing themselves to demand their rights...

"The Jan. 28-Feb. 1 Congress of Democratic Movements went largely unnoted in the U.S. press, but many Haitian activists believe it may mark a turning point for

the country's progressive forces.

"...Their goal was to open a dialog among the country's progressives that could lead to a working unity...

"Resolutions announced at the closing plenary analyzed the ruling junta as essentially Duvalierist and a barrier to progress. The delegates called for its replacement by a popularly based government. Other resolutions dealt with such diverse issues as land reform, democracy, the constitution, political culture and the police. The conference also created a national 58-member coordinating committee, to be known by the acronym Conacom, which will elect a general secretariat to implement the group's plans."

-Above passages excerpted from "Left Congress Raises Hopes--And Tensions," which appears on page 14 of the Feb. 25 edition of the GUARDIAN.

Religion

Should we, then, simply throw Christianity out and turn, for example to Islam? Hardly, because there are elements of Christianity which can be of use to us and, moreover, Islam is not An African religion. And it, like Christianity, was instrumental in the disruption of traditional African societies and the development of the slave-as-chattel system. What our situation requires is that we develop, from elements Christianity, Islam, traditional African religions, etc., a religion that will give us a sense of dignity and otherwise enable us to courageously face the problems specific to us as a subjugated African people in America. Or, our situation requires that we turn away from religion-as-an-institution altogether and find another means of unifying ourselves and doing the things that are necessary to be done to get us up off our knees.

-Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa/Editor

River

I say love
Like one says patient, regal siege,
River
Quick to overflow its banks,
Like royal sedge,
River
Creator of soil, fertile,
River
Ruin that taught me thus to ruminate,
The proud rich drift of ancient, buried age,
River
To which nothing is held back.
Wash away in my incline;
Widen me!

Ella Robinson